(*S* knows SR_p). However, a problem emerges here for Erdelyi's account, not because repression cannot ever be known by the repressing subject, but due to the consequences of repression, itself. As Freud notes, repression prevents more than just the target from becoming conscious, because not only is the "instinctual impulse . . . in some way inhibited, its precipitating cause, with its attendant perceptions and ideas, is [also] forgotten" (Freud 1939/1964, p. 128). That is, if repression is successful, then the connection with the repressed material prevents the act itself from becoming conscious.

The reasoning for this is as follows: To know that same act of repression (SR_p) requires knowing the terms involved in that act, which requires knowing p. However, if repression is successful, then it is no longer possible to know p, and so it would no longer be possible to know the repressive act, SR_p, until the repression is lifted (and even then it would not be automatically conscious but only so if becoming the object of a second mental act). Thus, even if the repressive act is known when repression first occurs, knowledge of this would not be possible after the act. Furthermore, the clinical phenomenon of "resistance," central to Freudian repression (cf. Madison 1961), and which Erdelyi fails to address, reveals that repression is more than simply ignorance that can easily be corrected (Freud 1910b/1957, p. 225). Instead, resistance occurs despite *S*'s "conscious" intention to know the repressed (Freud 1910a/1957, p. 30), indicating that the repressed is actively prevented from being known *unconsciously* (which raises certain theoretical questions concerning how this could occur – see Maze & Henry 1996; Boag, in press). "Suppression," on the other hand, appears to involve a subject *S* knowing the target (p), suppressing knowledge of it (such that p is no longer currently known), but both readily recalling p, and the act of suppression (SR_p), itself (Anspaugh 1995; Juni 1997). Rather than blurring the distinction between repression and suppression, then, it may be more helpful to simply recognise the existence of a *series* of defensive operations, as Freud indicated:

> Between repression and what may be termed the normal method of fending off what is distressing or unbearable, by means of recognising it, considering it, making a judgement upon it and taking appropriate action about it, there lie a whole series of more or less clearly pathological methods of behaviour on the part of the ego. (Freud 1936/1960, pp. 245–46)[2]

Erdelyi's general thesis is not incompatible with this position, although he appears to want to conflate repression with suppression to make the existence of repression indisputable. However, this is unnecessary because the existence of "inhibitory processes," of which repression is a species, is incontrovertible, and serves as an important avenue for empirical research of the motivated cognitive distortions that Erdelyi refers to. Freudian repression itself is best understood in terms of cognitive-behavioural inhibition (see Boag 2006), a conceptualisation which finds many parallels in contemporary psychology (e.g., Fox et al. 2005; Nigg 2000). Exploring the neural mechanisms of such processes provides a solid empirical platform for investigating psychodynamic processes, and of particular interest is the relationship among the prefrontal cortex, "behaviour inhibition," and the mediation of conflicting responses, as discussed within modern neuroscientific research (e.g., Cardinal et al. 2002; Ridderinkhof et al. 2004). Thus, while Erdelyi's proposal requires further conceptual development, his paper is an important contribution to bringing repression into the framework of contemporary empirical psychology.

NOTES

1. This viewpoint has a long history, spanning back to Aristotle (see Petocz 1999), through medieval scholasticism (see Pasnau 1997), and emerging in both the American new realists (e.g., E. B. Holt) and British realists (e.g., G. E. Moore, J. Laird, and Samuel Alexander; see Michell 1988). The position is also prominent in the Australian school of Andersonian Realism (see Anderson 1927/1962; 1930/1962; Baker 1986).

2. However, there is no clear difference in quality between unconscious and conscious processes, on the one hand, and normal and pathological behaviour, on the other (see Petocz 1999, p. 232).

Motive and consequence in repression

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Abstract: Erdelyi's unified theory of repression offers a significant advance in understanding the disparate findings related to repression. However, the theory de-emphasizes the role of motive in repression, and it is argued here that motive is critical to the understanding of repression as it occurs in the mental life of individuals.

Matthew Erdelyi's article, "The Unified Theory of Repression," presents a theoretical framework from which to view the vast array of findings on the phenomenon of repression. In this commentary I examine the implications of a unified view on our understanding of repression, particularly in terms of the role of repression in the ecology of the mental life of the individual.

Motive. One main feature of Erdelyi's unified theory is that it posits that the process of repression arises from the normal operation of attention and memory; it occurs as a function of human cognition due to the wide array of stimuli that may be impinging upon consciousness at any time. To support this argument, Erdelyi distinguishes between the *process* of repression itself, and the defensive purposes (the motive) repression frequently serves. The distinction between process and motive permits the use of evidence from a wide range of experimental literatures on attention and memory that had been previously thought to be unrelated to repression.

In separating process from defense, however, we may lose the concept of motive in our understanding of repression as it occurs in the ecology of mental life. While we have gained an understanding of how repression works, we are less equipped to understand why it occurs. It could be argued that motive is a critical aspect of repression; indeed, Freud referred to repression as inhibiting "unbearable" mental contents (Freud 1915a/1963), putting motive at the center of repression. A view of repression as the motivated forgetting or avoidance of unwanted mental contents gives us some purchase on the reasons why these processes may be employed, and allows us to link the behavior to informational threat in the environment.

Also, motive may also be a key in understanding why the use of repression becomes automatic (and therefore unconscious). Erdelyi shows that repression may be either conscious or unconscious, and there is extensive evidence for unconscious repression. As Baars (2002) points out, one of the apparent functions of consciousness is to facilitate learning, resulting in the automatizing of various processes. Once automatized, these processes are no longer under conscious control. If we assume that repression involves (in at least some instances) an automatic process, then the concept of motive allows us to link learning – a motivated acquisition of skills – with the automatizing of repression.

A further role for motive in the understanding of repression is a link to individual differences in the use of repression. A well-established line of research has examined individuals thought to use repression habitually; this individual difference is referred to as the repressive coping style (e.g., Weinberger 1990; Weinberger et al. 1979). Research on the repressive coping style has linked this to alterations in attention, memory for negative stimuli, autobiographical memory, and a range of other behaviours, generally elucidating the effects that repression may have on cognitive functioning (Derakshan & Eysenck 1997; Weinberger 1990).

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Consequence. Erdelyi's unified theory offers a framework for understanding the myriad, and in many cases confusing and contradictory, findings regarding the consequences of repression. For example, although some studies have shown differences in memory for negative stimuli among repressors (e.g., Ashley & Holtgraves 2003; Boden & Baumeister 1997; Davis & Schwartz 1987; Holtgraves & Hall 1995), others have failed to demonstrate these differences (e.g., Boden & Dale 2001; Brosschot et al. 1999; Schimmack & Hartmann 1997). Although it is clear that the use of repressive defense has implications for later information processing, it is unclear what the specific consequences of repression are.

Erdelyi argues that it is possible that repression encompasses a wide variety of information processing biases, including attention biases, forgetting, elaboration, and other cognitive alterations. On this view, repression could be viewed as an information-processing bias, rather than a discrete cognitive function. It is quite clear that the use of a panoply of defenses would result in an increase in noise in experimental designs; for example, a study designed to assess the nature of memory deficits in repressors following an unpleasant stimulus might yield contradictory or null results, simply due to the fact that the repressors in the experiment are actually using different (defensive) means to accomplish the same ends.

If indeed repression is better described as a kind of bias across a series of cognitive functions, rather than a specific function itself, there are a number of implications for further research. First, it would be useful to study any covariation between the nature of threatening stimuli and the cognitive functions involved in repression; it may be that certain functions "work better" with certain kinds of stimuli. Second, it would also be useful to determine whether there are individual differences at work in the use of particular functions in the service of repression (e.g., Brosschot et al. 1999; Shane & Peterson 2004b; Terry & Burns 2001). Erdelyi and others (e.g., Boden & Baumeister 1997) have argued that repression is not limited to repressors, but is probably a behavior that is common to all individuals; it is simply more easily measured under laboratory conditions in individuals who are thought to use it more habitually or with less provocation. It is unclear whether the kind of repression used to cope with, for example, thoughts of grief over the death of a loved one, is the same as the repression used to cope with everyday annoyances.

Summary. Erdelyi's unified theory of repression offers a significant advance in understanding the phenomenon of repression. It allows us to view repression as a bias in the operation of human cognitive functioning and, as such, allows us to better understand the disparate results of experimental studies of repression, and to proceed with further research that will aid in understanding the phenomenon. However, it is important to note that, while the process of repression and the (defensive) motive to repress must be disentangled for this advance to occur, the concept of motive is one that is critical to the understanding of the role of repression in the ecology of mental life.

The illusion of repressed memory

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Abstract: Erdelyi's unified theory includes the idea that traumatic memories can be unconsciously repressed so that they are enduringly inaccessible to deliberate recall. I argue here that clinical evidence for repressed memory is illusory, and illustrate this claim by examining previous studies of putative repressed memories and also recent research on nonverbal behaviors among survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Erdelyi's attempt, in the target article, to integrate the variegated literature on motivated memory distortion and inhibition is impressive in its breadth and scholarly conviction. However, his fundamental thesis, that literally all manner of behaviors associated with the processing, distortion, and inhibition of traumatic memory are essentially the same, is both ineffective and hazardous – ineffective, because it blurs the rich interactions between motivation and mechanisms charted out over decades of experimental research; hazardous, because it seeks to lend credence to the fairy-tale belief that enduring repressed memories are possible. I will limit my remarks to the latter.

Let's not begin with Freud. Why quibble over what he did or didn't say? As Erdelyi acknowledges (a "grand-Bartlett effect"; sect. 2, para. 5), both lay and professional theorists nearly uniformly associate the word *repression* with the idea that we can unconsciously bury traumatic memories so that they are unavailable to conscious recall for long periods of time. But, as myriad reviews have shown (e.g., Holmes 1973; McNally 2003), there is simply no solid evidence for this idea. What we can do – and here there is abundant evidence – is render traumatic memories relatively benign, not by unconsciously repressing them but through active inhibition of their emotional component (e.g., Foa et al. 1995b). When inhibition is effective, memories are still accessible, but they are less upsetting, and less gripping. Indeed, this is the core aim of exposure treatments (Foa & Rothbaum 1998).

Conviction in the illusory reality of repressed memory is fueled, as it has been since Freud, by superficial clinical evidence. A recent compelling example being Williams' (1994) interviews of women with documented childhood sexual abuse (CSA), occurring approximately 15 years earlier. Remarkably, 38% seemed to have failed to recall the target CSA event. Had they repressed it? Closer inspection suggests more mundane factors (Loftus et al. 1994). For example, most (67%) of those who did not report the target abuse did recall other abuse events; they simply failed to distinguish the target event from other repeated abuse experiences. Additionally, 9% of Williams' sample was age 3 years or younger when the target abuse occurred, and thus would not have reliably encoded the event. Also, as Williams noted, an estimated 4% to 8% of CSA reports are fictitious (Everson & Boat 1989). Finally, there is the possibility of deliberate nondisclosure. Unreported abuse was highest when the perpetrator was a family member. Because many CSA survivors remain in contact with family perpetrators, it is often easier to keep the past a private matter.

A study by Femina et al. (1990) even more poignantly illustrates the potential for misconstruing intentional nondisclosure as repression. These investigators interviewed another sample with documented abuse histories, and again a compelling subset (26%) seemed to have failed to recall the index event. However, when Femina et al. invited the failed-recall participants for an additional "clarification" interview in which they first attempted to establish greater rapport and then confronted them with the discrepancies in their prior report – all participants acknowledged the index abuse. They each had a reasonable explanation for deliberately withholding the information. One participant hoped to avoid further familiar stress (e.g., "My father is doing well now. If I told now, I think he would kill himself"; Femina et al. 1990, p. 229); another wanted to keep the memory private because it was too upsetting, and she wanted to forget about it; still another stated she withheld disclosure simply because she didn't like the interviewer.

Erdelyi resurrects Freud's idea that repressed memories, buried in the unconscious, find expression in hidden (latent) meanings, as if memories themselves could function as autonomous, goal-directed beings; a conception he notes that "experimental psychology often treats … as suspect" because of

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